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Research Note

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MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREE SHIPMENTS DROP SLIGHTLY

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Montana shipped 3.2 million Christmas trees to other states during the 1955 season. Although this was the ninth year that more than 3 million trees were exported, shipments were down 7 percent from the record 3.5 million trees shipped in 1954. The unusually early heavy snows undoubtedly hampered the harvest. Nevertheless, the 1955 shipments have been exceeded only three times in previous years--in 1946, 1949, and again in 1954.

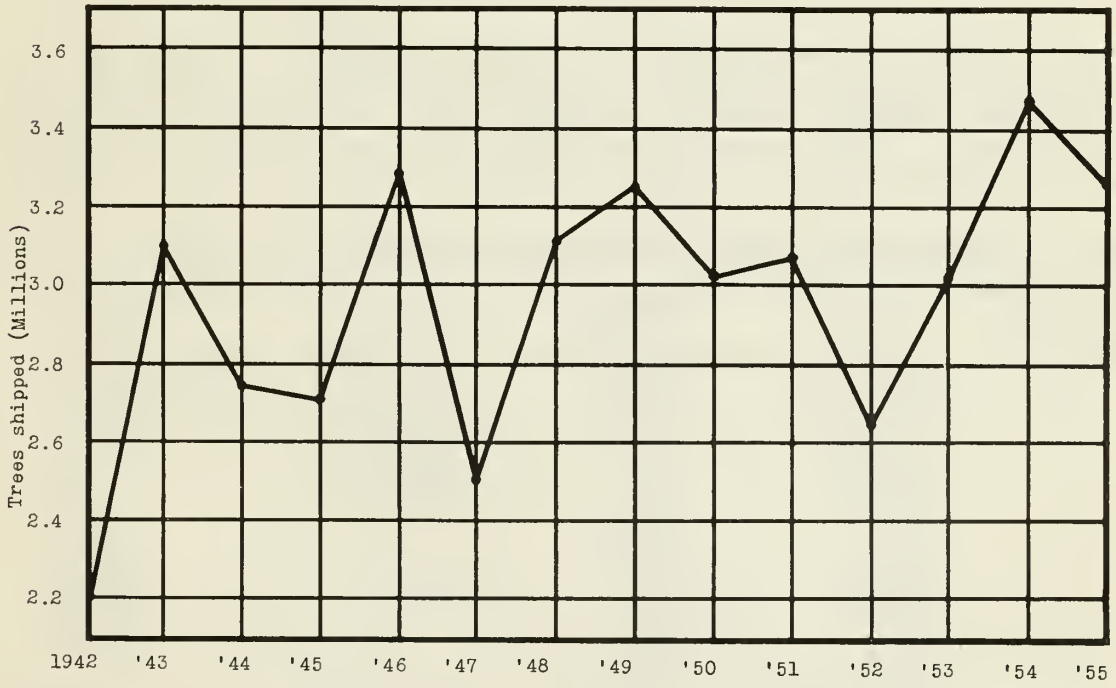

Figure 1. Montana Christmas tree shipments, 1942 to 1955.

Records indicate that most of the 1955 decline occurred in Missoula County, where shipments were down 45 percent from 1954. This drop seems to be largely the result of decreased truck shipments from Missoula County.

Table 1.--Comparison of Christmas tree shipments by county, 1954 and 1955

County	1954	1955	Change 1954 to 1955
	Number of trees		Percent
Lincoln	945,723	1,107,990	+17
Flathead	1,163,230	1,102,280	-5
Missoula	778,844	431,181	-45
Lake	306,615	295,457	-4
Sanders	157,552	173,076	+10
Powell	2,053	51,602	+2414
Mineral	23,750	38,072	+60
Ravalli	86,933	32,656	-62
Other 1/	17,668	2,580	-85
Total	3,482,368	3,234,894	-7

1/ Includes Granite and Silver Bow Counties.

Lincoln and Flathead Counties continued as Montana's leading Christmas tree shipping centers and jointly contributed 68 percent of the total Christmas tree exports. Three counties, Lincoln, Flathead, and Missoula, shipped over 80 percent of the 1955 Christmas tree crop. Lincoln County shipments exceeded those of Flathead County for the first time in 7 years.

Table 2.--Total 1955 shipments of Christmas trees from Montana by county

County	Rail shipments 1/	Truck shipments	Total	Percent of total
Lincoln	1,011,750	96,240	1,107,990	34
Flathead	1,016,500	85,780	1,102,280	34
Missoula	346,750	84,431	431,181	13
Lake	294,500	957	295,457	9
Sanders	142,500	30,576	173,076	6
Powell	-	51,602	51,602	2
Mineral	38,000	72	38,072	1
Ravalli	4,750	27,906	32,656	1
Other 2/	-	2,580	2,580	3/
Total	2,854,750	380,144	3,234,894	100
Percent of total	88	12	100	

1/ Data from reports by the Northern Pacific, Great Northern, and Pacific Railway Companies.

2/ Includes Granite and Silver Bow Counties.

3/ Less than 0.5 percent.

Montana Christmas trees found markets in 27 states during 1955. One carload of trees was exported to Cuba. Texas, Iowa, and California were major markets and received 40 percent of the total rail shipments. Christmas tree markets are not static. For example, during the past 5 years Illinois' import of Montana trees has dropped from over 600,000 to 166,000 trees. On the other hand California has increased her demands from less than 70,000 trees to 342,000 in the same 5 years. Thus, new markets develop to replace the old ones. These marketing fluctuations appear to be a normal part of the Christmas tree industry. Possible causes for this may be competition from other areas, variation in quality of trees, and lack of permanently organized retail outlets.

Table 3.--Rail shipments to leading markets for Montana Christmas trees, 1955 and 1954

1955			1954		
State	Trees	Percent of total	State	Trees	Percent of total
Texas	465,500	16	Texas	484,500	18
Iowa	346,750	12	Iowa	337,250	12
California	342,000	12	Missouri	323,000	12
Missouri	299,250	11	Oklahoma	304,000	11
Kansas	270,750	9	Illinois	285,000	10
Oklahoma	266,000	9	Nebraska	190,000	7
Nebraska	213,750	8	Kansas	171,000	6
Illinois	166,250	6	California	166,250	6
Louisiana	95,000	3	Louisiana	123,500	5
Colorado	57,000	2	South Dakota	61,750	2
Others	332,500	12	Others	313,500	11
Total	2,854,750	100		2,759,750	100

As usual the railroads shipped most of the Christmas tree crop. More trees were shipped by rail in 1955 than in any year since 1946. Fewer trees moved by truck in 1955 than in either 1954 or 1953.

Table 4.--Comparison of railroad and truck Christmas tree shipments from Montana, 1942-1955

Year	Rail shipments		Truck shipments	
	Trees	Percent	Trees	Percent
1942	2,138,800	97	64,950	3
1943	2,930,750	94	171,730	6
1944	2,636,250	96	119,500	4
1945	2,555,500	94	168,000	6
1946	2,867,000	87	432,400	13
1947	2,210,000	88	305,640	12
1948	2,731,250	88	391,636	12
1949	2,816,750	87	440,206	13
1950	2,693,250	89	324,530	11
1951	2,783,500	90	301,040	10
1952	2,375,000	90	269,600	10
1953	2,389,250	79	631,031	21
1954	2,759,750	79	722,618	21
1955	2,854,750	88	380,144	12

Canada exported 126,000 trees to Montana in 1955. While this was the largest number of trees ever sent to Montana from Canada, it is a small percentage of Montana's Christmas tree shipments.

Table 5.--Christmas trees imported from Canada to Montana, 1946-1955

Year	Total number of trees imported	Percent of total shipped
1946	107,570	3.3
1947	89,944	3.6
1948	67,664	2.2
1949	54,050	1.7
1950	39,288	1.3
1951	72,036	2.3
1952	99,918	3.8
1953	99,055	3.3
1954	123,076	3.5
1955	125,603	3.9

This report is not a survey of production It covers only Christmas tree shipments and is based on very accurate rail shipment records from the three railroads in Montana and estimates of truck shipments from the Montana State Forester, the University of Montana, the national forests, and the U. S. Customs Service. We estimate that the report accounts for 95 percent of the total shipments. The remaining 5 percent is unreported truck shipments.